

## Study Possibility: Summaries

“Summarizing helps us to understand and make meaning of the events of everyday life – what we read, what we view, and what we experience.”

-Emily Kissner, *Summarizing, Paraphrasing, and Retelling*

Writing a summary is a **display of what the writer understands about a topic, lesson, or text.**

Students are often asked to write a summary after reading texts or completing an activity, such as a science experiment, watching a video, or a field trip. By summarizing, the student shows what they comprehend, their ability to sift

through many details and find the important ones, and synthesizes ideas. Students who can summarize effectively can learn more easily and more effectively. (Garner, Gillingham, and White)

**Due to the complex thinking that a student must do to write a summary, high stake tests often ask students to summarize text. Constructing a summary assesses how a student uses a variety of comprehension strategies.**

To write a summary, students use several **reading comprehension strategies** including:

- *Determining Importance* (identifying what is important vs. what is interesting)
- *Inferring*
- *Summarizing and Synthesizing*

See the **Reading CALI Comprehension Section** to find information and supports for teaching comprehension strategies.

A possible confusion for students centers on the amount of information to include in a summary. If the test asks for a brief summary and gives a few lines to write, the student must synthesize their information to the bare essentials. At other times the test may ask for a summary while giving a full page for the response. This type of summary is asking the student to go beyond the gist of the text and give more details. Students need to learn to be flexible and be able to answer both types of summary prompts.

## **Cinderella Summarized**

**Using the fairy tale *Cinderella*, here are examples of a brief summary and a more comprehensive summary.**

### **Brief Summary:**

Cinderella wanted to attend the Prince's ball, but her evil step-mother would not allow her to attend. Her fairy godmother makes Cinderella's wish come true. At the ball Cinderella and the Prince fall in love and then get separated, but eventually find each other to live happily ever after.

### **Comprehensive Summary:**

Cinderella, a hard working young woman, lives with her evil step-mother and step-sisters. When the Prince decides to have a ball to find a wife, every young unmarried woman wishes to attend. Cinderella's step-mother will not allow her to attend, but on the night of the ball Cinderella's fairy godmother appears and grants her wish. There is one catch- Cinderella must return home by midnight. At the ball, Cinderella and the Prince fall in love. Cinderella loses track of the time. As the clock strikes midnight, Cinderella flees and loses her glass slipper. The Prince searches the kingdom to find his love- the person who can fit the slipper. When the Prince arrives the step-mother tells her daughters to push their large feet into the tiny slipper while telling Cinderella to stay out of sight. While the step-sisters try on the slipper, the Prince spies Cinderella and asks her to try on the slipper. The slipper fits and the couple lives happily ever after.

## **Key Elements to Writing a Summary**

- Generally, the main idea is stated at the beginning of the piece in a sentence or two.
- Includes important details - - the details that support the author's main points.
- Gives key ideas from a piece of writing (unlike a review, which tries not to reveal the end of the piece)
- Uses their own words (paraphrases the information)
- Shorter than the original piece of writing
- Reflects the structure of the original text.
  - Simple narrative texts are usually a beginning, middle and ending with a problem the character(s) must solve.
  - More complex narrative texts may have a beginning with the conflict or central problem identified, followed by obstacles that the main character has to overcome while trying to solve the conflict/central problem, and a resolution of the conflict/central problem.
  - Nonfiction texts may follow several different text structures. Some of these are cause and effect, compare and contrast, description, problem and solution, and chronological order.
- Should not include the opinions of the summary writer
- Includes key language/vocabulary from the text and displays an understanding of the key words or concepts